
Title: a book radiating magic

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Absentia
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As you open the book and
begin to read, the words
on the page shimmer and
disappear - becoming an
animated illustration.
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Sunlight streamed through
a crack in the wall of
the crypt. Zahndra
moaned, eyes fluttering,
and shaded her face with
a bare arm. Something
wasn't right....

She sat up. Cold stone
was beneath her hand.
Squinting she looked
around. This was the
Szvoyza crypt. Zh'Azhak's
crypt.

How....
Memories hit all at once,
like a swift kick from a
horse. They knocked the
wind from her.

Zahndra lay on the bed,
body twisting and writhing
in beautiful agony.
Zh'Azhak stood over her.
But this was not their
usual game... something
was...wrong... Poison!
Poison coursed through
her veins like cold fire.

In the memory Zahndra
cried out in anguish, and
the same feral scream
escaped her throat now.

She remembered. It had
been a silver arrow.... but
from where?

The memory took hold
again...

Empty potion bottles,
tomes, grimoires and
scrolls lay haphazard
throughout the room.
Nothing could quench the
potency of the blood
poison. And the Curse
prevented her from being
Turned. Despite all
Zh'Azhak's skill, all his
power, there was nothing
that could be done. They
both knew it. Entropy
would claim her soon. Her
love leaned down, kissing
her tenderly on the
forehead. "Sleep...."

What had happened after
that?

Zahndra slid down off the
stone tier. A thick layer
of dust and cobwebs
covered everything.

"How long have I been
here?" she wondered.
Everything inside the
crypt was ruined.
Decrepit tapestries hung
precariously on the walls.
Hours passed as she
searched for clues,
anything, that might
answer that question.
Nothing. Finally finding
what appeared to be an
exit, Zahndra leaned with
all her strength against
the rusted iron door. It
open just enough to let
sunlight stream in...
and to let her slip out.
Outside things were no
better. The air smelled...
wrong. Zahndra didn't
recognize any of the
forest surroundings,
though she had been to
the Szvoyza crypt many
times. Barefoot and clad

in nothing but a flimsy gown she nimbly jogged between twisted trees. Creatures that she came across gave her a wide berth. Even an ogre gazed at her warily and did not attack.

When night fell, the moon rose full. Now she was able to travel faster. Forgoing sleep, Zahndra made it to Umbra in a matter of hours. Moving through shadows she surveyed the city. This was not the Umbra she knew or remembered. Shop fronts were different, faces were unfamiliar. What was that tall creature with wings and horns? Some sort of deamon? In the morning she would find answers...

At dawn she headed to the tavern.

The information she gathered talking to patrons and the tavern keeper had led to a terrible conclusion. Hundreds of years had passed since she walked the lands of Sosaria. Charnel Hill lay abandoned. Her companions... gone. Her lover... what had become of Zh'Azhak? The time that she had been asleep... it was not so long to an immortal vampire. She vowed to find him, no matter how long it might take. But there were few paths to achieve this end.

She knew what she had to do.

Pulling on fur boots and a winter cloak, Zahndra whispered the words of recall from a scroll and

moved through the ether,
stepping out on the wind
blasted snow of Dagger
Isle.

The images on the page
swirl and coalesce into
words once again.
